

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 3, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Roadless Area Conservation Rule Rescission – DEIS & Proposed Rule

Dear Secretary Rollins and Chief Schultz,

As Members of Congress representing a broad range of communities, stakeholders, and outdoor interests, we write in strong support of the U.S. Forest Service's Roadless Area Conservation Rule ("Roadless Rule") and in firm opposition to the Department of Agriculture's proposal for rescission. We urge the Department to halt this effort and instead focus on effective implementation of this longstanding and successful policy.

Since its adoption in 2001, the Roadless Rule has served as a cornerstone of public lands conservation, now protecting approximately 44 million acres of National Forest System lands across 37 states. These areas provide clean drinking water, critical wildlife habitat, carbon storage, and world-class recreation opportunities. Iconic landscapes such as the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the Gila National Forest in New Mexico, and the George Washington National Forest in Virginia exemplify the ecological, cultural, and economic importance of these lands.

The Roadless Rule was developed through one of the most robust public processes in federal rulemaking history. The Forest Service received 1.6 million public comments - approximately 95 percent in support - and held over 600 public meetings nationwide. In contrast, the current rescission effort has lacked meaningful public engagement. The Department provided just 21 days for public comment on the Notice of Intent in 2025 and has yet to hold any public meetings. Despite these limitations, more than 600,000 comments were submitted, with over 99 percent opposing rescission. This overwhelming and bipartisan public support underscores the continued popularity and importance of the Roadless Rule. Unsurprisingly, at just 30 days, the ongoing comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and proposed rule is equally insufficient, and we encourage the USFS to extend the comment period to 120 days for a fair and transparent process.

Given the extraordinary public interest in the Roadless Rule and the significant consequences that its repeal would have for communities across the country, the Forest Service should also conduct a robust series of in-person public meetings before finalizing any rescission. Additionally, Tribes are entitled to the opportunity to engage in robust consultation, as the repeal of the Rule will have dramatic consequences on their way of life. When the Roadless Rule was originally developed, the aforementioned 600 public meetings ensured that affected communities, Tribes, local governments, industry, recreation interests, and conservation organizations had the opportunity to engage directly with the agency. The proposal to repeal the Rule warrants the same level of public engagement. Public meetings should be held in regions where National Forest System roadless areas are most affected, providing local communities with a meaningful opportunity to ask questions, provide testimony, and ensure the administrative record reflects the perspectives of those who will experience the greatest impacts. A transparent, accessible, and geographically representative public engagement process is

essential to maintaining public confidence in the rulemaking process and ensuring the agency fully considers the consequences of such a consequential policy change.

The enduring support for the Roadless Rule is rooted in its clear and measurable benefits. Over the past 25 years, the rule has helped protect watersheds, biodiversity, and ecosystem integrity by limiting road construction and large-scale logging in undeveloped areas. Forest Service data show that watersheds within roadless areas are far more likely to be in “properly functioning” condition compared to those outside of them, which are more often classified as “at risk” or “impaired.”¹

These healthy ecosystems support a wide array of wildlife. Roadless areas provide habitat for hundreds of species listed or proposed for protection under the Endangered Species Act, including grizzly bears, lynx, and other sensitive species, and disproportionately support species of conservation concern. In addition, these areas play a vital role in climate resilience and carbon storage. For example, the Tongass National Forest alone stores over 1.5 billion metric tons of carbon and sequesters millions more annually.

Claims that the Roadless Rule impedes wildfire management are not supported by the evidence. The rule explicitly allows for wildfire prevention, suppression, and hazardous fuels reduction. In fact, nearly 2 million acres of roadless areas have undergone fuel treatments in recent years.² Forest Service data also show that roadless areas account for a significant share of fuel treatment activities relative to their forest coverage. Research further indicates that wildfire risk is comparable inside and outside of roadless areas and that roads are not necessary to maintain forest health.

Moreover, scientific studies demonstrate that wildfire ignitions occur far more frequently in roaded areas due to human activity.³ By limiting road construction, the Roadless Rule helps reduce ignition risks from sources such as vehicles, campfires, and other human causes.

Finally, the economic benefits of the Roadless Rule are substantial. By avoiding the construction and maintenance of new roads, the rule saves taxpayers billions of dollars. The Forest Service already faces a road maintenance backlog of nearly \$6 billion across its existing system.⁴ Expanding road networks into remote and often economically unviable areas would only increase these costs. At the same time, protected roadless areas support recreation, tourism, and outdoor economies, while safeguarding clean water and subsistence resources that communities rely on. When it comes to outdoor recreation, roadless areas encompass more than 25,000 miles of trails, 8,500 climbing routes, 1,000 miles of whitewater, and more than 10,000 miles of mountain biking trails across the country, all of which support a \$1.3 trillion outdoor recreation economy. Additionally, hunters and anglers across the nation access these public lands where backcountry provides ample fishing and hunting. The Roadless Rule protects drinking water in 354 municipal watersheds, saving downstream communities millions of dollars in water filtration costs.⁵

After 25 years of successful implementation, the conclusion is clear: the Roadless Rule is effective, widely supported, and essential to responsible forest management. Rescinding it would undermine decades of progress and impose unnecessary environmental and fiscal costs.

¹ https://www.wilderness.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Report-WatershedHealthinWildernessEtc_2012.pdf

² <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/09/17/ex-forest-service-chiefs-warn-against-logging-ban-repeal-00569334>

³ Aplet G. et al. “Three-decade record of contiguous-U.S. national forest wildfires indicates increased density of ignitions near roads.” Fire Ecology; Balch J.K. et al., “Human-started wildfires expand the fire niche across the United States.” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. (2017) 11(114): 2946–2951.

⁴ <https://www.taxpayer.net/energy-natural-resources/comments-on-noi-to-repeal-the-roadless-rule/>

⁵ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2001/01/12/01-726/special-areas-roadless-area-conservation>

We respectfully urge the Department to end its unjustified rescission of the Roadless Rule.

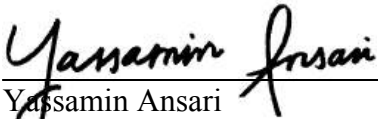
Sincerely,



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress



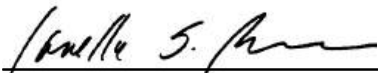
Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator



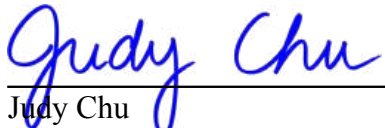
Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



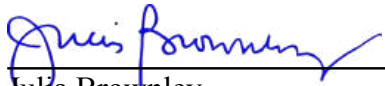
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



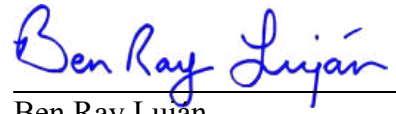
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



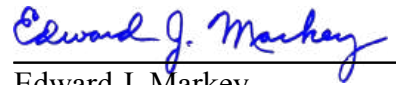
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



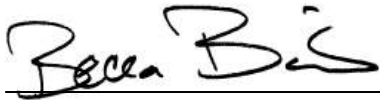
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



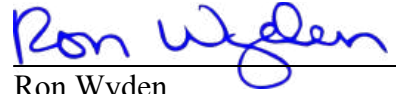
Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



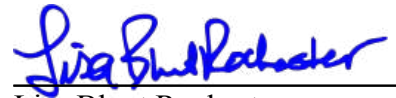
Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Frank Pallone, Jr.
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Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Jan Schakowsky
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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



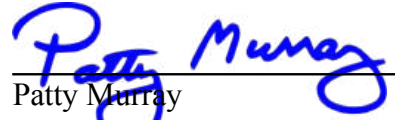
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



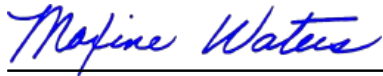
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Dave Min
Member of Congress



Patty Murray
United States Senator



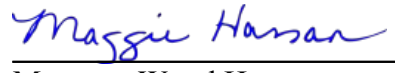
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



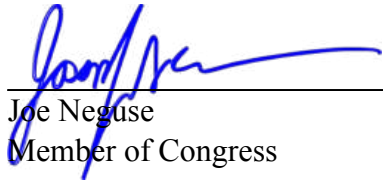
Jacky Rosen
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Raja Krishnamoorthi
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Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Joe Neguse
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Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
United States Senator



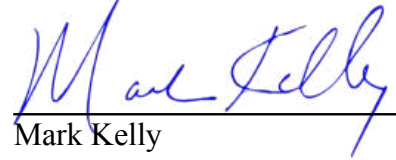
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



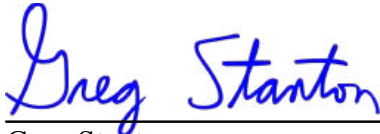
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



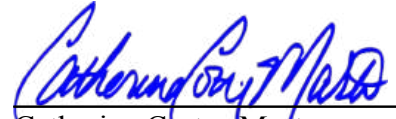
Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



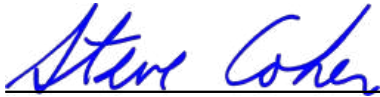
Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Greg Stanton
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Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress



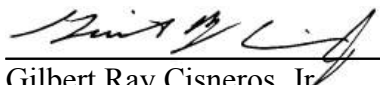
Mark R. Warner
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Brendan F. Boyle
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Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



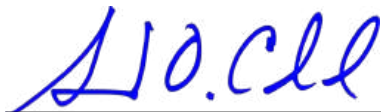
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



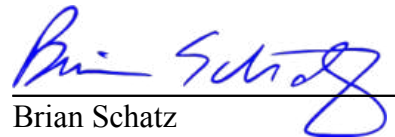
Rashida Tlaib
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Andy Kim
United States Senator



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Mike Quigley
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Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Maxine Dexter, M.D.
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



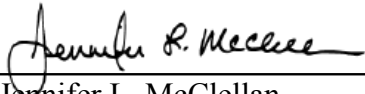
Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



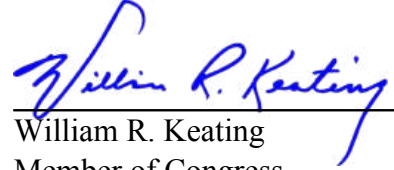
Ed Case
Member of Congress



Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



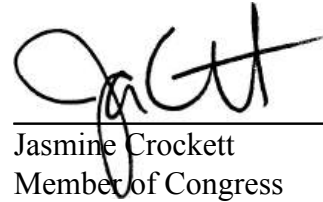
Jennifer L. McClellan
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William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
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Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress



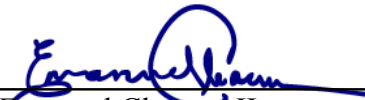
Wesley Bell
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Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Valerie P. Foushee
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress



André Carson
Member of Congress



Angie Craig
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee on
Agriculture



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



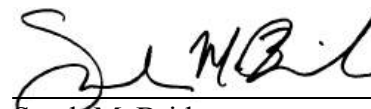
Dwight Evans
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



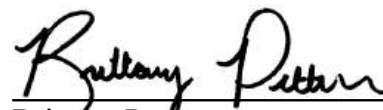
Chellie Pingree
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Sarah McBride
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



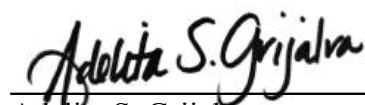
Brittany Petersen
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress



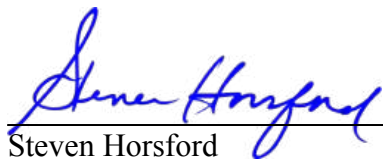
Nellie Pou
Member of Congress



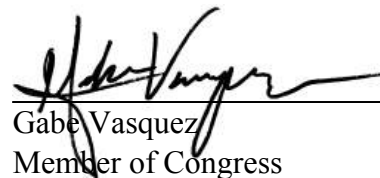
Adenita S. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Mike Levin
Member of Congress



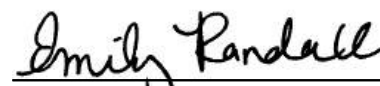
Steven Horsford
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Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress



Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress



Emily Randall
Member of Congress



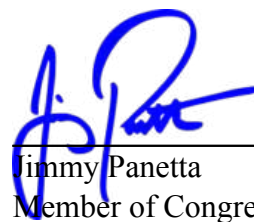
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



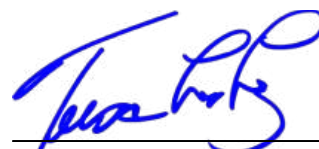
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



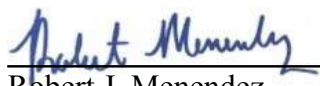
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



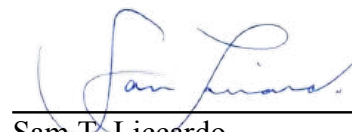
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernandez
Member of Congress



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



Sam T. Liccardo
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



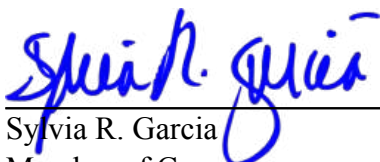
Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



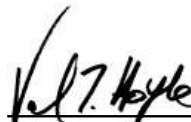
Brian K. Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Maggie Goodlander
Member of Congress



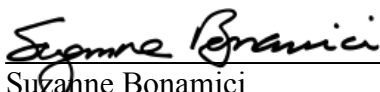
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



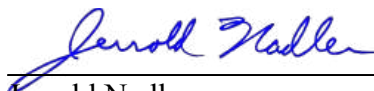
Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress



Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



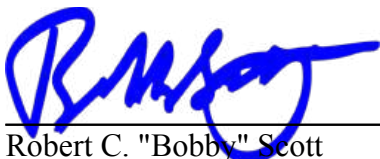
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



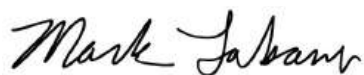
Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress



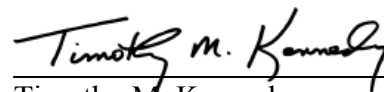
Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Derek T. Tran
Member of Congress



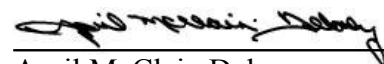
Mark Takano
Member of Congress



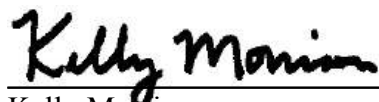
Timothy M. Kennedy
Member of Congress



Gabe Amo
Member of Congress



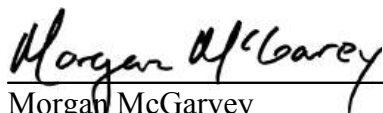
April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress



Kelly Morrison
Member of Congress



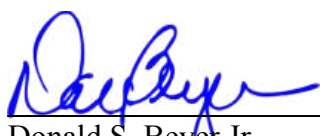
Josh Riley
Member of Congress



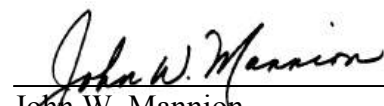
Morgan McGarvey
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



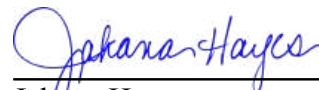
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



John W. Mannion
Member of Congress



Laura Friedman
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress



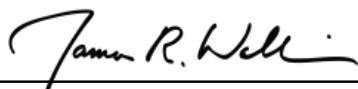
John Garamendi
Member of Congress



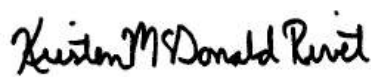
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



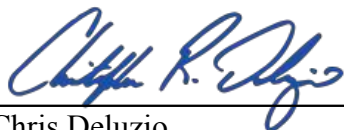
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



James R. Walkinshaw
Member of Congress



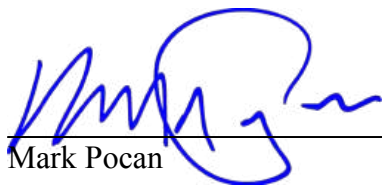
Kristen McDonald Rivet
Member of Congress



Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress



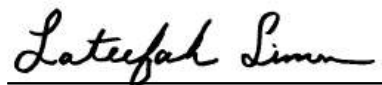
Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Susie Lee
Member of Congress



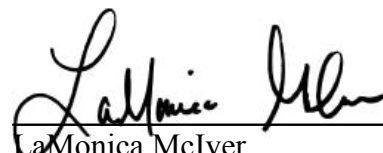
Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



George Whitesides
Member of Congress



Jim Himes
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